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CLASS PROBLEMS IN ADVANCED SPANISH

By CARLOS CASTILLO

THE problems which confront the teacher of advanced Spanish may be divided for convenience into two classes, namely, those pertaining to pronunciation and those related to grammar.

During the elementary year, especially during the first few weeks, the average teacher puts forth his greatest effort to impart to the pupil a correct pronunciation or one as nearly so as his or her own limitations will allow—a pronunciation as nearly like the teacher's as possible. This effort diminishes in direct proportion as the course progresses until a point is reached where other efforts, such as are required by certain grammar drills, translation, composition, work, call for their share of attention.

On the other hand, grammatical facts, very few at the outset, accumulate rapidly, reaching the pupil daily as unfolded by his First Spanish Course, reinforced later by the First Composition Book, and supported by the grammatical notes of the Reader.

The attitude of the majority in the class is that pronunciation is easy to master, and that all there is to say on the subject was practically exhausted in the first few weeks. On the other hand, the conviction grows that Spanish grammar is not at all easy, that there are numberless little details to bear in mind in order to construct a sentence, that almost every other verb which the student is likely to encounter happens to be irregular or radical changing in the particular tense needed, and that the subjunctive, the passive voice and the reflexive construction are a frequent source of annoyance.

When the pupil is ready to enter a more advanced class he is too often found wanting in the same respects as when he began the subject, namely in pronunciation and in grammar.

I propose in this paper to assume the above statements and present my views under the following headings: (a) reading material; (b) pronunciation and (c) grammar.

A

Reading material in advanced classes should be of two kinds, (1) material designed for intensive work, and (2) literature for

extensive reading. The purpose of the first is to acquire language training; that of the second, mainly to put the student in contact with Spanish letters, and to awaken in him a taste for good literature.

By reading of an intensive kind is meant the reviewing of the vocabulary with a view to enrich one's fund of active words, and to this end the study of synonyms and antonyms, derivatives, compounds, and cognates in the day's lesson is of great value, a short story or a play being well suited for this purpose. It also embraces the study of every idiom encountered, grammar drill based on the passage, oral and written questions suggested by it, the retelling of the selection, the paraphrasing of idioms, and the like.

The extensive reading, a large share of which must be done as home work, might be made the subject of an oral and written report required for the term.

B

In regard to pronunciation our goal should be, first, to make the pupil's enunciation intelligible and inoffensive, and second, to make it agreeable. It goes without saying that in the relatively short time devoted to one course it cannot be made *perfect* in the great majority of cases (especially in the case of men students) even at the expense of great effort on the part of the teacher, and to the detriment of other accomplishments in the course. To delve into the minute details of phonetics, such as the multiple shades of the vowels, the intricacies of metaphony, and other subtleties is beyond the province of the average teacher, demanding, as it does, the kind of training designed for specialists. It seems best, therefore, to direct our efforts to eradicate faults obviously offensive to the Spanish ear, such as I will endeavor to outline.

I. The pronunciation of vowels without diphthongization or glide, particularly *e* and *o*. While there are in truth open and close varieties of these letters, the danger of diphthongization by the American student is in the *close* rather than in the *open* variety; an *e* or an *o* considerably more open than it should be is intelligible at least, but the same vowels if only more slightly close than they should be are intolerable. As to the letters *u* and *i*, the reverse is true. The American student tends toward an open variety as found in the English *bit* and *good*, *bitter* and *putting*,

thus pronouncing *dom̃ngo*, *mũndo*, *segũndo*, etc.; hence the close variety of *i* and *u* should be emphasized, if not exclusively and invariably taught. Furthermore, in orthographic combinations of vowels ordinarily called diphthongs by grammarians when either *i* or *u* stands unaccented before a vowel, the semiconsonantal value should be thoroughly understood by the pupil, who tends naturally to separate or divide sounds thus: *ti-e-ne*, *su-a-ve*, *indi-a-no*, etc.

II. Among the consonants the sounds represented by the following, *l*, *d*, *t*, *r*, *b*, *v*, and *g* are worthy of very particular attention. What is more familiar to us than mispronunciations such as *kəb-bæl-io* for *kaballo* (*caballo*); *tʰreʲz* for *tres*; *æg-gwa* for *agua*¹ (*agua*); *favoər* for *fabər* (*favor*); *senjoər* for (*señor*); *χoʷzeʲ* for *χoze* (*José*); *kæd-da* for *kaða* (*cada*); *tʰængo* for *tengo* (*tengo*), and a thousand others.

III. The so-called glottal catch is one of the most difficult defects to eradicate and perhaps the most common of all. It imparts to language that jerky effect comparable to the motion of a springless vehicle on an uneven surface. To help eliminate this cacophony, reading verse aloud, practicing constantly on the *same* selection is highly desirable. The same prosodic figures occurring in verse, namely, *synelepha*, *sineresis*, *elisions*, and the like, are ever present in the ordinary speech. As an example of convenient poems, I wish to suggest the Rhymes of Becquer, particularly those in which the longer meters predominate, such as the following:

Yo se un himno gigante y extraño
 Que anuncia en la noche del alma una aurora,
 Y estas páginas son de ese himno
 Cadencias que el aire dilata en las sombras.

IV. One more remark may be made before we leave the matter of pronunciation. There are numberless Spanish words whose spelling immediately suggests to the student the corresponding English equivalent. These groups of words deserve the special

¹The *g* here represents the Spanish fricative *g*. Our printer has not the correct symbol.

attention of the teacher, as they are almost invariably distorted by a receding shift of stress. Examples, *caridad*, *amabilidad*, *autoridad*, and the multitude of words in *-ción*, and *-sión*, *expresión*, *ocasión*, *variación*; numerous words in *-al*, *animal*, *colosal*, *inicial*; words in *-or*, particularly if longer than two syllables, *picador*, *aparador*, *comedor*, etc.

The above outlined defects and others of similar nature should be more in the mind of the teacher of advanced Spanish than the somewhat ridiculous emphasis placed by many on differences between the Spanish of the Old World and that of the New World, which are very insignificant among the *cultured* persons of the Spanish race and which do not affect the vital question of *correctness*.

C

On the subject of grammar reviews there are certain specific points which it might be well to have in mind and which merit particular emphasis, among which I wish to suggest the following:

1) The usage of the verbs *ser* and *estar*. Only constant drill and copious examples are of any avail here. Many a student seems to gather his notion from the ordinary rule given a prominent place in his grammar, namely, that *ser* expresses a permanent condition while *estar* expresses a temporary state or idea, and hence when he encounters the sentence, "John was a soldier for two years," he often renders it thus: "Juan estuvo soldado por dos años,"—because of the limitation of time. This notion of permanency for *ser* and the reverse for *estar* seems to be uppermost in the pupil's mind, thus eclipsing other most important considerations, such as *origin* or *extraction*, *ownership*, *material*, the *predicate noun*, which are not duly emphasized in his text, where exercises are often rather scanty.

2) Perhaps equal in importance to the above is the distinction between the preterite and the imperfect of the indicative. It is true here as well as in the *ser-estar* question that the line of demarcation is not always perfectly defined, and that there are instances within a certain *zone* where either tense might properly fit, but at any rate a set of exercises for cases on either side of this neutral zone, so to speak, should be devised, and also a separate set of exercises illustrating that at times the distinction is not so binding, and that either the preterite or the imperfect is acceptable.

3) Another point of paramount importance and as frequently a stumbling block for the student is the distinction between the prepositions *para* and *por*. Much of what was said under (2) is applicable here.

4) Of equal moment is the distinction between *pero* and *sino* and the usage of *sino que*.

5) Drill on the most common verbs requiring a preposition before an infinitive is indispensable, together with a *negative* drill on those ordinary verbs that *do not* require it, but where the student invariably seems to feel the need of one.

6) Conditional sentences, the simple and the contrary to fact conditions, should be thoroughly understood.

7) The passive voice and the reflexive substitute, distinguishing clearly the two cases, namely, reflexive personal and impersonal.

8) A study of the idiomatic usage of certain verbs, such as *quedar*, *meterse*, *gustar*, *gustar de*, *hacerse*, *echar*, *dar*, *dejar*, *dejar de*, as well as the different constructions of such verbs as *olvidar*, *sorprender*, is invaluable.

9) A more extended treatment of the subjunctive than that afforded by the first year grammar is in order, emphasizing not *rules* so much as the underlying distinction which pervades the various uses of the mood. Students are often encouraged to memorize certain conjunctions which *govern* the subjunctive mood; a more correct view, however, is to have them understand that these conjunctions are themselves required by a *previous idea* which requires the subjunctive, and thus we may elucidate how the same conjunction may be followed by an indicative or a subjunctive according to the dominating or leading idea of the sentence. In other words, the pupil should not be asked to *memorize* grammar so much as to *understand* it.

In conclusion I may remark that we are greatly handicapped for lack of a grammar for the 2nd and 3rd years of Spanish. We are very fortunate indeed in having access to more than one excellent First Spanish Course, but I do not know at present of one good review grammar for Advanced Spanish. There is a considerable gap between our First Spanish Course and Ramsey's Text-book of Modern Spanish or Bello-Cuervo's Gramática Castellana.

University of Chicago